

COVER ESSAY

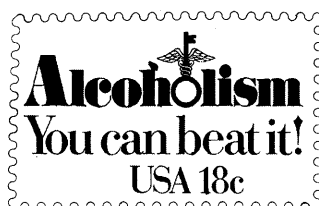
A final word on postage stamps

John T Tierney

This issue of *Tobacco Control* presents the sixth cover with a dramatic display of international anti-tobacco postage stamps. Regrettably missing from all these covers has been an anti-tobacco postage stamp issued by the US Postal Service.

In the past 20 years several countries have issued postage stamps directed at four health problems which cause substantial morbidity and mortality: smoking, illicit drug use, abuse, and AIDS. The US was the first country in the world to issue a postage stamp on illicit drug use (figure). This was done in 1971. "Prevent Drug Abuse" was a clear and unequivocal message. Invoking a short and snappy command is relatively easy in the case of an illegal activity which has no visible operating structure.

A decade later in 1981, the US issued an alcohol abuse postage stamp (figure). The message could have appropriately and easily been a clone of "Prevent Drug Abuse" with "Prevent Alcoholism." Since alcohol is a legal



beverage (for adults) having a visible and powerful operating structure, one can speculate that postal officials refrained from a frontal attack on alcohol—moving away from an aggressive preventive strategy as employed in drug abuse to a more passive treatment strategy. There appears to be an effort to compensate for this change in strategy by injecting "hope" into the message "Alcoholism—you can beat it!" rather than simply telling drinkers in an emphatic way to stop or control their drinking.

The philatelic press has reported that the Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee (CSAC) approved an AIDS stamp in December 1992.

The CSAC is responsible for reviewing all suggestions for proposed postage stamps and making recommendations to the Postmaster General. In a given year the CSAC may receive 20000 to 30000 suggestions for new stamps. The final decision on a stamp belongs to the Postmaster General who typically authorises the issue of 100 to 120 new postage stamps each year.

The CSAC recommendation on the AIDS stamp is a tribute to the commitment and dedication of Anne Hlavacek, a nurse at the University Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin, who had her suggestion turned down more than a dozen times in the last five and a half years.

I propose that all organisations and individuals concerned about tobacco and health join together in requesting the CSAC to recommend the issue of an anti-tobacco stamp by the Postmaster General.

Letters of support should be written to:

Chairman

Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee
475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW, Room 4474E
Washington, DC 20260-6756 USA

Other countries that have not yet issued anti-tobacco postage stamps should mount similar campaigns.

Two previous cover essays on anti-tobacco postage stamps were published in Tobacco Control (1992; 1: 5-6, 87-8). The former included a list of 43 countries that have issued anti-tobacco postage stamps.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many individuals who provided us with stamps for use on the first six covers of the journal: Vera Luiza da Costa e Silva, Robert A Greenwald, James H Lutschg, Rikiei Shibasaki, John T Tierney, and Agis Tsouros. — ED

Note to readers

We would like to solicit your ideas and contributions for future covers of *Tobacco Control*. Like the covers with anti-tobacco postage stamps, we would like future covers to be colourful and creative—with a tobacco control theme. Original artwork, anti-tobacco posters, photographs, and cartoons may all be considered. Material with an international flavour would be particularly desirable. A cover essay will generally appear in each issue to provide appropriate background information and commentary on the cover.

Please send ideas and submissions (originals or high-quality, camera-ready photographs) to the editor at the address on the inside front cover. — ED

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